



Tonto Natural Resource Conservation District



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Regarding: Docket # NRCS-IFR-08005

This letter is to provide comment on the new 2008 EQIP Rule that became effective January 15, 2009. As a representative of the Tonto Natural Resources Conservation District located in Payson, Arizona, we support the EQIP program and the intent of the program in addressing resource concerns in our area.

The majority of the land within the district boundaries is public land and less than 4% is private land. Many of our agriculture producers have operations that consist of only public and state owned lands. We understand eligible land in the new rule to include:

- (1) Privately owned land;
- (2) Publicly owned land where:
 - (i) The land is a working component of the participant's agricultural and forestry operation, and
 - (ii) The participant has control of the land for the term of the contract, and
 - (iii) **The conservation practices to be implemented on the public land are necessary and will contribute to an improvement in the identified resource concern that is on private land.**

As a representative of the Tonto Natural Resources Conservation District, we ask that this be interpreted or changed to include state owned land as well as private land. Without this change, many of our agriculture producers would not have land eligible for the program and resource concerns that exist on these lands will increase and will not be addressed. By allowing inclusion of state owned land, states with lesser amounts of privately owned land have a more equitable opportunity to participate in EQIP and realizing the benefits that the program has to offer.

Sincerely,

Tommie Martin
Chair, Tonto NRCD